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Inside Story on Over Iran Planes

Secret Documents Show Turner Fears Soviets Will Lure Crews to Defect

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CIA Director Stansfield Turner thinks it "reasonable to assume" the Soviet Union will likely make a "major effort" to grab a new, sophisticated U.S. radar plane if it is sold to Iran.

Also, sources say, Turner has said the threat that Soviet espionage poses to the plane's security in Iran may be no greater than that which can be expected when it is deployed in NATO.

Turner's general concern for the overseas security of the plane, called AWACS for Airborne Warning and Control System, has long been known. But extensive, detailed information about Turner's position, which is still classified secret, is now emerging.

Also just coming to light are the classified rebuttals from other segments of the administration which do not share Turner's assessment of the risks to the security of the system if it is sold to Iran as the Carter administration wishes.

Memoranda and letters outlining both sides of the debate have been widely circulated on Capitol Hill. Sources there say both sides of the security debate that has been conducted behind closed doors can now be seen more clearly.

IT IS THAT DEBATE which generated much of the opposition to the sale in Congress, forcing President Carter yesterday to retract his proposal for a seven-plane, \$1.2 billion deal with Iran until September when Congress will consider it more fully.

Turner's oral testimony on the subject of AWACS security is said by some who've heard it to soften his position somewhat. The intelligence chief, however, has said under congressional questioning that he stands by his written comments on the issue.

The main documents expressing Turner's positions are his July 7 letter to the General Accounting Office and his answers to a number of security-related questions which are attached to that letter.

The letter highlights his chief concerns. Among other things, he says the plane with all-Iranian crews "poses a target for induced defection that goes beyond any opportunity or temptation we have previously exposed to the Soviet Union."

He goes on to say that "the advanced AWACS technology, and the Soviet lack of anything comparable, makes it reasonable to assume that the U.S.S.R. is likely to be willing to invest a major effort and whatever money may be needed in an attempt to obtain a wheels-down landing of an AWACS within Soviet territory."

"ASSESSING the likelihood of such an Iranian defection is subject to many uncertainties, but the possibility of such occurring should not be dismissed out of hand. It is one of the factors that needs to be weighed in any consideration of the pros and cons surrounding the proposed AWACS sale," Turner wrote.

Turner maintains that the United States does not have adequate information with which to predict the adequacy of Iranian security.

While the CIA director finds good points in Iranian security, he said the negative side includes the very structure that the Shah of Iran imposes on his security apparatus.

"The Shah is a proponent of the divide-and-rule principle. There is little cooperation among the intelligence and security services, and jurisdictional rivalries are a way of life," according to Turner.

"Although it is the impression of U.S. observers that Iranian security is tight, it would appear prudent to recognize that the risk of Soviet penetration exists along with a consequent risk of compromise for information and equipment provided," according to Turner.

AS FOR NATO, which is also a potential customer, Turner said "the risk to the AWACS arising from espionage is probably no greater in Iran than it would be in Europe."

Other administration officials are not so pessimistic. Sources say Deputy Defense Secretary Charles W. Duncan Jr. yesterday gave the House International Relations Committee a document that answered many of Turner's concerns.

As far as Iranian security is concerned, the Duncan document pointed out that the contract governing the sale will provide for security requirements and will mandate a security review involving the CIA one year before the scheduled delivery of the first AWACS in 1981.

Moreover, U.S. counterintelligence units will operate at the bases at which the AWACS is based.

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